



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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By: Sgt. Edward Eagerton, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

Partnership between Alaska, Mongolia strengthened by common cause

ULAANBAATAR, Mongolia – Brig. Gen. Mike Bridges, commander of the Alaska Army National Guard, met with Duma Namsrai, deputy chief, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), to discuss matters of emergency preparedness and future training partnerships between their two respective nations at the NEMA office in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, during Khaan Quest 12, Aug. 13.

Bridges attended the meeting while in Mongolia as part of the National Guard State Partnership Program. He also visited Khaan Quest, a regularly scheduled, multinational exercise sponsored by the U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) and hosted annually by the Mongolian Armed Forces. Khaan Quest 12 is the latest in a continuing series of exercises designed to promote regional peace and security. This exercise marks the tenth iteration of this regionally significant training event.

During the meeting, Bridges explained that, like NEMA's role in Mongolia, the Alaska National Guard was one of the organizations in Alaska responsible for responding to natural disasters. The significance of the meeting was emphasized by the fact that both Alaska and Mongolia share a likelihood of catastrophic earthquakes.

"It's not a matter of if," said Bridges, "it's a matter of when."

In Alaska, preparing for emergency scenarios is more than just hypothetical training. In 1964, Alaska was hit by a 9.2 magnitude earthquake, the most powerful one ever to hit North America, and the second most powerful ever recorded by a seismograph. That earthquake resulted in approximately 130 deaths.

Through his translator, Namsrai explained that NEMA's main duties are to protect the civilians of their nation. Working with organizations like the National Guard in its ongoing state partnership program with Mongolia was an important endeavor, as his president was also greatly concerned with earthquake risks.

Bridges went on to explain that part of preparedness also entailed educating the public. In Alaska, education of the public about natural disaster risks and the steps the public could

take to prepare for such emergencies was critical in minimizing the loss of life in the event of a natural disaster. In Operation Be Prepared, the public sector of Alaska was educated through radio, print and television materials.

"The community needs to know on a regular basis," Bridges said.

After so many years, he explained, the level of awareness dwindles as people forget, move on, and as leadership in the organizations tasked with responding to such emergencies change over. By continuing to train for these kinds of scenarios, the information stays current, and the awareness does not give way to complacency.

Namsrai expressed his wish to continue to work with foreign organizations and the National Guard, acknowledging the importance of sharing procedures and technology with one another.

Bridges then mentioned a future training exercise called Vigilant Guard, scheduled to take place in Alaska in 2014, that will simulate an earthquake and tsunami with mass casualties. His hope was that Mongolia would be able to send some of its counterparts to participate in the exercise.

On behalf of his nation's president, Namsrai expressed his appreciation for the invitation to the exercise.

It is engagements like this – state partnership programs like the one between Mongolia and the Alaska National Guard – or USARPAC-sponsored exercises like Khaan Quest that continue to strengthen the bonds between nations and help secure a better future for all involved.

At the end of the meeting, the two exchanged gifts with one another, taking a piece of their counterpart's culture with them.

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Cutline:

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Brig. Gen. Mike Bridges, commander of the Alaska Army National Guard, exchanges gifts with Duma Namsrai, deputy chief, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), at the NEMA office in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Aug. 13. Bridges attended the meeting while in Mongolia as part of the National Guard State Partnership Program. He also visited Khaan Quest, a regularly scheduled, multinational exercise sponsored by the U.S. Army Pacific and hosted annually by the Mongolian Armed Forces. Khaan Quest 12 is the latest in a continuing series of exercises designed to promote regional peace and security. This exercise marks the tenth iteration of this regionally significant training event. Photo: Sgt. Edward Eagerton, 134th Public Affairs Detachment, Alaska Army National Guard